



# Nature's Call

*An Activity Newsletter for Kids by Utah's Project WILD--Winter 2001*



## Utah's Wonderful Wild Canids!

(That's kă-nidz.)

Wolves, coyotes and foxes are all dog-like animals called canids. All the dogs that people keep as pets (domesticated dogs) are relatives of wild canids. This makes them canids too. Wolves, coyotes and foxes though are wild canids.

Wild canids all share dog-like features. They have long, narrow snouts, pointed ears, slender legs, padded paws, fur coats and long bushy tails. Canids are carnivores. This means they eat meat. Foxes and coyotes also eat insects, berries and grasses. All canids have 42 sharp teeth in their jaws. Four of these, the long, pointed teeth you see when your dog snarls, are called canines. These teeth help canids grab and hold on to their prey.

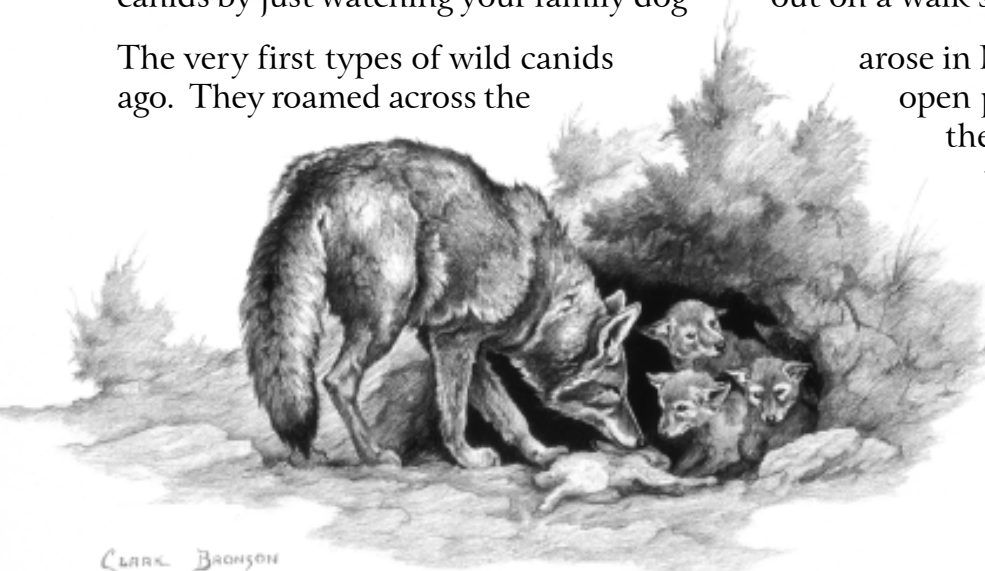
Canids are the marathon runners of the mammal world. They do not wait for prey to come to them. Instead they chase their prey for long distances. They are not fast runners but can run for a long time. Canids have four toes on each foot. On the front feet, there is also a fifth toe called a dewclaw high up on the foot. Canids actually run on their toes, unlike people who run on their feet. This makes their stride longer and helps them cover more ground as they run. Canids also have a strong thick claw on each toe. These claws grip the ground to help give them extra traction when they run. You can tell that a track was made by a canid instead of a felid (a member of the cat family) if you see claw marks along with the toe pad imprints.

Wild canids can also hear very well. They can hear sounds that are too faint and too high in pitch for people to hear. Sometimes pet dogs are used as guard dogs because they can hear so well. Like pet dogs too, wild canids use calls such as howls, barks, whimpers and growls to communicate with each other.

Canids also have a very keen sense of smell. This is because canids have about five times more smelling surface inside their noses to capture scents. Scent can tell canids a lot. It is used by canids to recognize each other. Scent is also used for marking the boundaries of their territories. And canids can use scent to find their prey. Canids can have a sense of smell at least a hundred times better than that of people. You can see how important smelling is to canids by just watching your family dog out on a walk sometime.

The very first types of wild canids ago. They roamed across the

arose in North America about 35,000 years open prairies of the continent along with the animals they hunted. As a group, wild canids were very smart. Because of this, they were able to adapt quickly to many new climates and surroundings. Today wild canids live on every continent except Antarctica. Seven species live in North America.



CLARK BRONSON

***Read on to learn more about the Wild Canids of Utah!***



## Wild Canids: Truth or Tale

People have shared a long history with wild canids. Some they took in from the cold became “man’s best friend. Others they admired and watched from afar. People noticed that wild canids had many qualities valued by people. Many lived in family groups like people and took loving care of their young.

Over time people began to tell stories about wild canids. Some of these stories had much truth to them. Others, written as fables often portrayed wild canids as human-like characters. In many Native American stories they were given supernatural personalities. Coyotes, for example, were sometimes heroes that helped humans by giving them the sun and the moon and performing magical deeds. At other times, coyotes were portrayed as tricksters. A lot of the Native American stories and fables were told to teach lessons.

In early times, much folklore about wild canids was based on things that were not completely true. Stories often made wild canids appear to be dangerous. They made a lot of people afraid of wild canids. Many popular European fables written by the Brothers Grimm and Aesop painted wolves in a bad light. Most of you have probably heard some of these stories. One of the most famous is “The Three Little Pigs.” You also probably have heard many stories about evil werewolves. Another well-known story featuring a wolf is “Peter and the Wolf.”

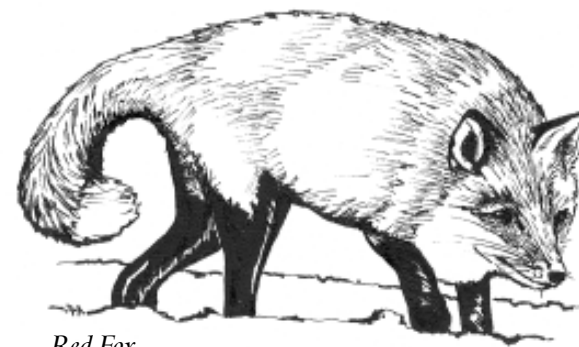
Foxes have played roles in many myths and legends too. Many feature the beauty, craftiness and solitary nature of foxes. In Scandinavia, foxes were thought to cause the northern lights, which they called “fox fires.” In some Asian cultures, foxes were sometimes seen as demons that could possess the souls of people. “Reynard” the fox is a very popular French story where the clever fox gets away with thievery and other crimes because of his cleverness. In American folklore, Brer Fox is well known. In one famous story, called “The Tar Baby,” Brer Fox captures Brer Rabbit by tricking him with a fake doll made of tar.

Some neat facts about the wild canids that live in Utah are written below. After you have read the information here, go to the library and read some fables and stories about wolves, coyotes and foxes. Then, compare what the fables and stories tell about these animals to what true stories (non-fiction) say about them. Maybe later you too can write a story or fable about your favorite wild canid!

**Gray Wolf:** The gray wolf is the largest canid in North America. Wolves hunt in small family units called packs. They feed mainly on large mammals such as deer and elk. The strongest male and female in a pack are called the alpha pair. They are in charge of the pack. All wolves in the pack know their rank or position. By using expressions on their faces and body postures, wolves can tell each other who is “top dog” and who is not. They also can tell who wants to play.

Utah used to be home to wolves, but none live here right now. Wolves are an endangered species in most of the lower 48 states of America. When people first settled this county, they were afraid of wolves because stories like “Little Red Riding Hood” made wolves seem scary. Because of their fears, people killed wolves. So many wolves were killed that most were gone by 1930. Most people now know that wolves are not bad like the “big bad wolf.”

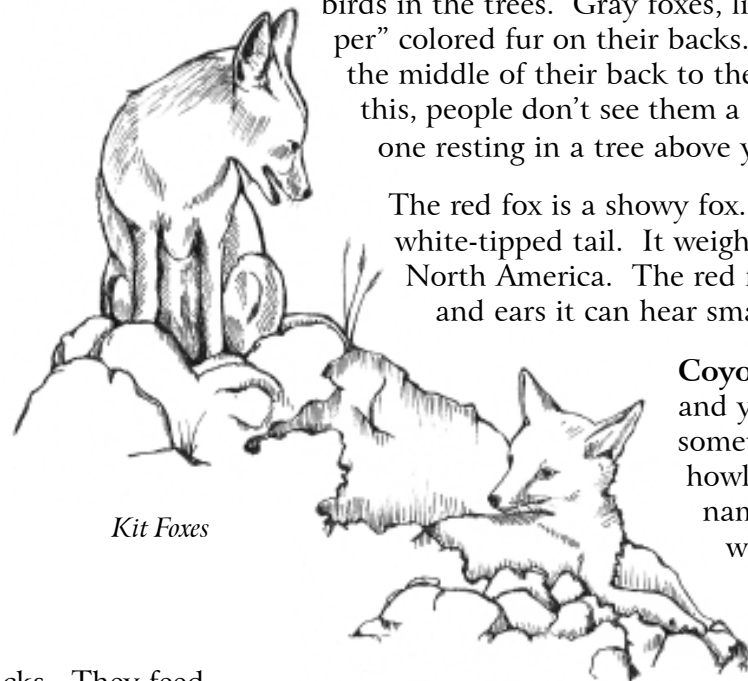
Wolves don’t kill and eat people like they do in some fairy tales. Instead, people know that wolves are important predators in wild areas. Wolves are now being restored to some places where they lived before. Some people think that wolves might even move back into Utah from Wyoming or Idaho in about 10 years.



Red Fox

find insects, lizards, small mammals and other critters it eats. Kit foxes are desert dwellers. Their fur blends in well with the sand. They live in large burrows with many tunnels. Inside their burrows they are safe from the hot desert sun and predators like hawks and coyotes.

The gray fox is nicknamed the “tree fox.” This is because it is the only canid that climbs trees. In Utah, they live in woodland areas found in the central and southern parts of the state. Gray foxes climb trees to escape from danger. They also sometimes hunt for prey such as squirrels or small birds in the trees. Gray foxes, like their name tells you, have grayish “salt and pepper” colored fur on their backs. They also have a long black stripe running down the middle of their back to the tip of their tail. Gray foxes are very shy. Because of this, people don’t see them a lot. On a hike in the woods you might not even see one resting in a tree above your head.

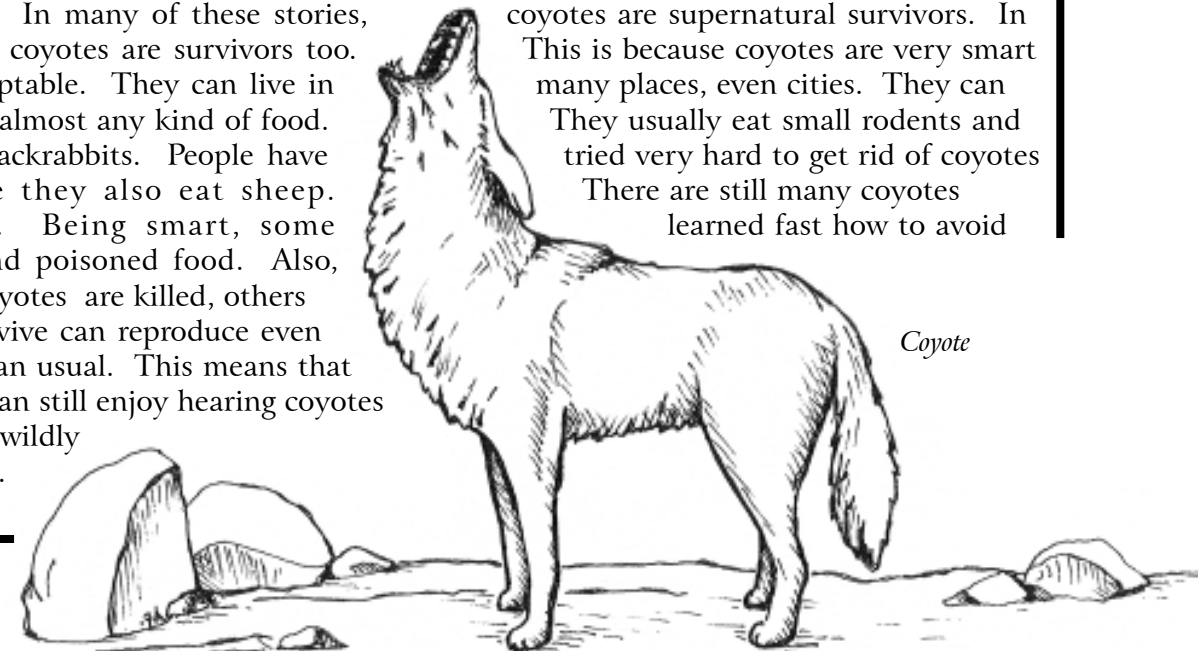


Kit Foxes

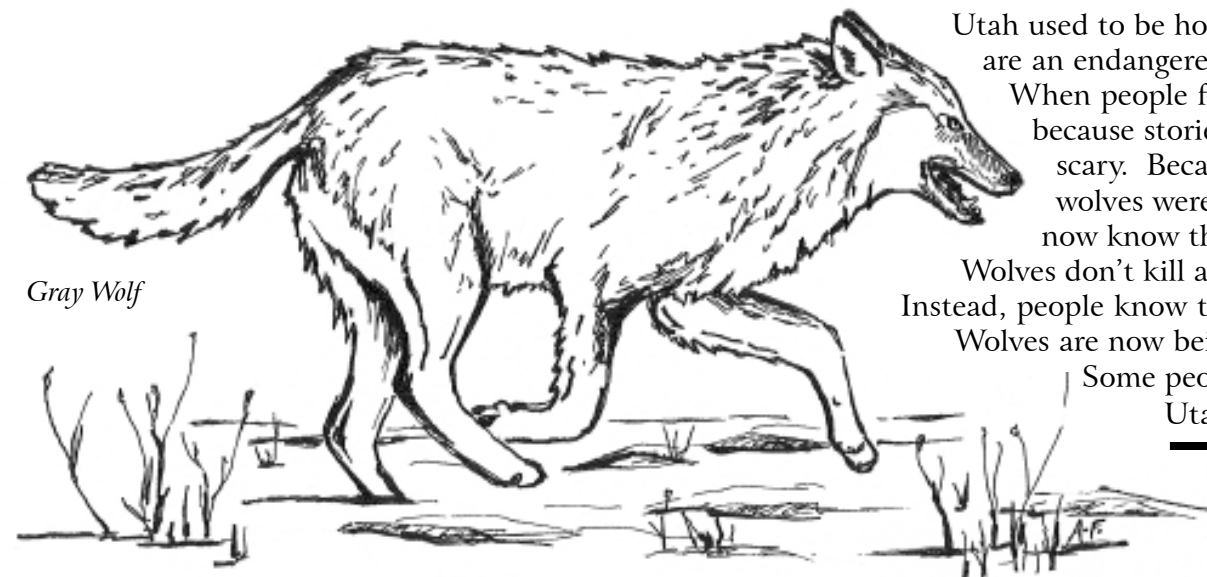
The red fox is a showy fox. It has bright red-orange fur, black “stockings” and a white-tipped tail. It weighs about 12 to 14 pounds and is the largest fox in North America. The red fox hunts by stalking its prey. By turning its head and ears it can hear small mammals even below a thick layer of snow. When

**Coyote:** Coyotes are famous for their high-pitched howls and yipping barks. You may have heard coyotes howling sometime if you have ever gone camping. Because of their howling, some people call coyotes “song dogs.” Their name, “coyote,” comes from the Aztec word coyotl which means “barking dog.” Coyotes howl for different reasons. Howling sometimes serves to bond pack members. Howling also is used to declare territory boundaries to other coyote packs.

Native Americans knew coyotes well. They told many fables and stories about coyotes. In many of these stories, coyotes are supernatural survivors. In real life, coyotes are survivors too. This is because coyotes are very smart many places, even cities. They can They usually eat small rodents and tried very hard to get rid of coyotes There are still many coyotes learned fast how to avoid



Coyote



Gray Wolf

Many artists enjoy drawing and painting wild animals. One famous wildlife artist is a man named Robert Bateman. Some of you may have seen a painting of his before. One, on the cover of his first book, "The Art of Robert Bateman," shows a beautiful red fox. You too can be a wildlife artist. You can start here by fingerpainting a Funny Fox! Read below what you will need and what to do before you start.

**What You Need:** A copy of this page; orange, white and black poster paint; 3 paper plates; a fine black marker; water and paper towels to wash and dry your hands.

### **What To Do:**

- 1) Spread a thin layer of paint onto each paper plate (one color per plate).
- 2) Carefully dip your palm and your first two fingers into the orange paint (be sure to keep your thumb and other fingers up and out of the paint).
- 3) Place your two fingers inside the snout of the fox and your palm in its head. Press down on the paper to spread the paint. Wash off the paint.
- 4) Carefully dip only your palm into the orange paint (keep all of your fingers and thumb up).
- 5) Place your palm, with your fingers pointing to the top of the fox's head. Press down to spread the paint. Wash off the paint again.
- 6) Dip the tip of your thumb into the white paint. Print inside the ears of the fox. Dip the tip of your first finger into the white paint. Print along the bottom edge of the fox's chin and neck to add some white fur. Wash off the paint.
- 7) Dip the tip of your first finger into the black paint. Print in the fox's nose at the tip of its snout. Dip your fingertip again and print each of the fox's eyes. Wash off the paint.
- 8) Let the paint dry. When it's dry, use the fine black marker to redraw in some of the thin black lines that may have been covered by paint (look at the unpainted drawing that was given with the activity).

Note: If your hand is too big to fit in the fox outline here, enlarge the image on a copy machine. Or if you are real artistic, paint the fox's head first and then draw the outline with the fine black marker yourself afterwards.

